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My Hero / by Salvatore Giannella

Hans Jonas gave me the Ethics of life

«Acting to safeguard the world», says Giannola, the first lady of the Noninos, «it is the philosopher's last will»

Dear Giannola, among the 66 steam stills of the distillery in Percoto we have seen the masters of our time. I think I'm submitting you to a difficult operation asking you to mention who, among these masters, you consider your guiding spirit.

«The philosopher Hans Jonas. He entered my life on January 30th 1993, when, at the age of 90, he was awarded the Nonino Prize. It was a magic moment: Jonas gave us the gift of his reflections that anticipated themes that today are quite topical, as the protection of the planet. He spoke of an ethics for the technological civilization and formulated a new imperative: "Act so that the consequences of your actions are consistent with the permanence of true human life on earth". It was an apparently simple imperative. Each of us should make it his/her own».

An imperative launched six days before his death ...

«Jonas had rejoiced at the news of the Prize, but then he had heard an inner voice that suggested him to stay home, in New York, because he was too old for a trip across the ocean. Then, however, he had seen the name between the brackets, Udine, after Percoto. With the strength of an invincible belief, and against prudence's advice, he decided he had to come. A German Jew, he had been a member of the Jewish Brigade of the British Army and contributed to the liberation of Italy. He had been in Udine in the early 1945. Here he had met two Jewish sisters from Trieste who had told him how they had escaped from the Nazis and survived hunger selling the few things they had brought with them. One day, in Udine, they had bought some lard at the black market. The day after a man had knocked at the door of the attic where they hid. "Forgive me", he told them, "I didn't know your story. The lard has been sold at a too high price, here's your money back"».

Why is Jonas a guiding light for you and for who wants to change?

«For his humanity, his moral care, his invitation "to form an alliance, all of us, in order to bring back within our limits the forces that threaten both the mankind and the biosphere" We should always reflect on our capacity of damaging our planet».

How can his ideas help the Italians improve in this difficult moment?

«He makes all of us, Italians, reflect because it was our fault to choose managers and politicians focused on the conquest of the power, on their interests and who are indifferent towards the concreteness of real problems, everybody's problems. His words might make a new ruling class grow, more careful to the respect of ethics and of our life».

Master of thought

On top, Giannola Bulfoni and, here above, Hans Jonas (1903 – 1993), German philosopher of Jewish origin.